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ABSTRACT

A study was designed to investigate English as a second language (ESL) teachers' and students' perceptions of the appeal and appropriateness of ESL textbook illustrations. In particular, the notion that response to the various stylistic representations of the human figure may, in part, be culture-bound was examined. Three basic questions were asked: (1) How do American ESL teachers and teacher trainees perceive ESL textbook illustrations of the human figure? (2) How do adult and college-bound ESL students perceive the same illustrations? (3) Are there significant differences in perception among the cultures or regional groups represented by the students and teachers? For this preliminary study, a booklet was prepared that contained six stylistically different representations of the human figure and a Likert scale opinionnaire for each sample illustration. Subjects tested were American ESL teachers and teacher trainees and Asian ESL students. Statistical analyses of the data showed significant differences in the response of the Americans and Asians for several of the six illustrative styles. (Author)

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CROSS-CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS OF ESL TEXTBOOK ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE HUMAN FIGURE*

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This study concerns the perceptions by American ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers and teacher trainees and by adult/college-bound ESL students of illustrations of the human figure in ESL textbooks. The basic question that motivated the study asks whether there are cultural differences in the perception of which illustrative styles are considered appealing and appropriate for ESL textbooks. Three specific questions are dealt with: 1) How do American ESL teachers and teacher trainees perceive ESL textbook illustrations of the human figure? Is there any pattern as to which type or style of drawing is considered most appealing or appropriate for an ESL textbook? 2) How do adult (college- and profession-bound) ESL students perceive the same illustrations? Is there any pattern as to which are considered appealing and appropriate? 3) Are there significant differences between the responses of the teachers and students, and/or among the various regional groups and cultures represented by the sample population?

Motivation for the Study

Some years ago I was struck by an incident that occurred in one of my ESL classes. I had been using cartoons, drawn by myself, as mnemonic devices for dialogue memorization. At some point in the middle of the term, one student, who admittedly was unhappy in

* I would like to thank Joseph Cotham and Kathleen M. Bailey for their helpful comments on the design and data analysis of this project.

the class, took the day's dialogue pictures and, in a burst of emotion, tore the page up, claiming that the cartoon characters were all too ugly. Most of my American colleagues had thought they were amusing.

I began to reflect on my own responses to illustrated matter, and realized that I, also, had very strong reactions to certain styles of drawings. In fact, much to my professional dismay, I had to admit that I often rejected ESL textbooks outright if I had a negative reaction to the illustrations. Discussions with my colleagues, other teachers, and more recently, teacher trainees, confirmed my suspicion that I was not alone. Particularly revealing was the discovery that most of us go through similar procedures when selecting or perusing textbooks. If the cover attracts us, we open the book. If the illustrations and other visuals (photos, general format and layout) are not appealing, we move on. Informal queries of publishers at conference exhibitors' booths indicate that this is typical behavior of conference goers who are looking over materials.

It is clear, then, that illustrative appeal plays an important role in the textbook selection process. It is equally clear that our students have no say in the matter of textbook selection and must live with what is selected for them. Illustrations are an integral part of language teaching materials, particularly at the lower levels. We might assume, therefore, that both teacher and student response to and interaction with illustrative material can affect in part what happens in the classroom. Just what the effect consists of is a matter for empirical investigation. Suffice it to say that a positive, negative or neutral response to illustrative

material no doubt has an effect of some kind that will in some as yet undefined way influence the quality of the teaching/learning experience. This pilot study is a first attempt to look at these responses from a cross-cultural perspective.

Getting Started: Establishing Stylistic Categories

Although everyone can recognize that many different artistic styles exist in ESL textbooks, categorizing and labeling these styles is problematic. It was decided, therefore, to attempt to establish stylistic categories by means of a card sorting task. Several illustrations from each of twenty three different sources, primarily ESL textbooks, were photocopied and put on 5x7 index cards. All illustrations were approximately the same size, depicted multiple human figures, and contained no written matter or dialogue.

Three tasks were structured. Thirteen subjects, all ESL teachers or teacher trainees, were told: 1) Sort the cards into as many or as few categories as you wish; do not worry about applying labels; 2) Sort the cards into six unlabeled categories; do not worry about applying labels; 3) Sort the cards into six labeled categories. All subjects were told to respond to artistic style and not to content. Although trends in categorizing were obvious from the first two tasks, only Task 3 provided enough agreement so that representative illustrations from the six categories could be chosen for the study. The six categories used in this study, labeled by the researcher, are as follows:

1) Real: May have a photo-like quality and include half-tones.
2) Semi-real: A detailed line drawing, real in form but with no half tones; some stylization may be evident.

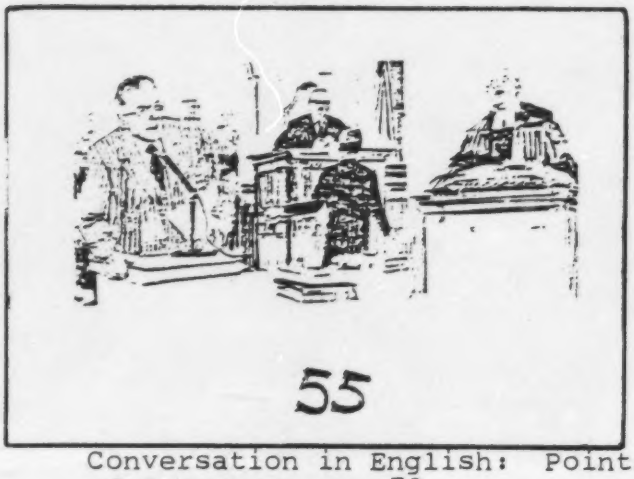
3) Stick: Stick figures only.

4) Cartoon-cute: Obvious cartoon figures with distortions and simplifications characteristic of many comics.

5) Cartoon-real: Somewhat cartoon in character, i.e., could not be labeled realistic; lacking the excess distortions of Cartoon-cute.

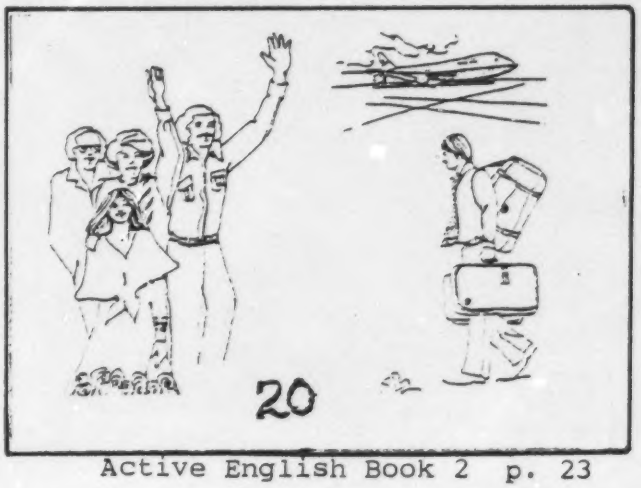
6) Free-line: Extremely simple, loose-lined suggestive drawing; few details.

One illustration was then chosen from each of the six categories. The final selections used for this study and their sources are shown below. The numbers are arbitrary coding aids.



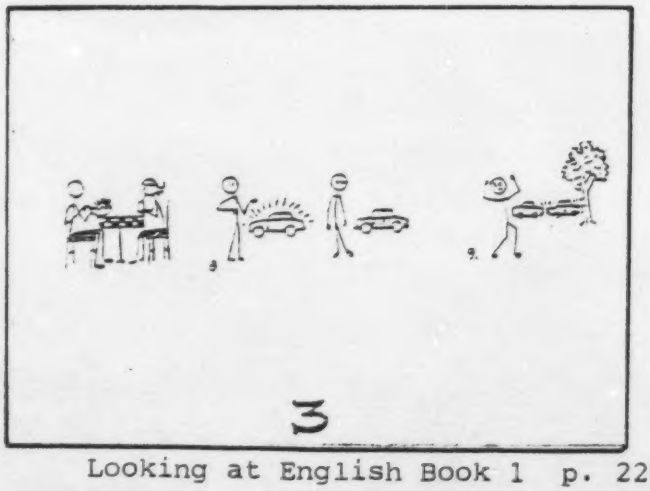
Conversation in English: Points of Departure p. 72

REAL



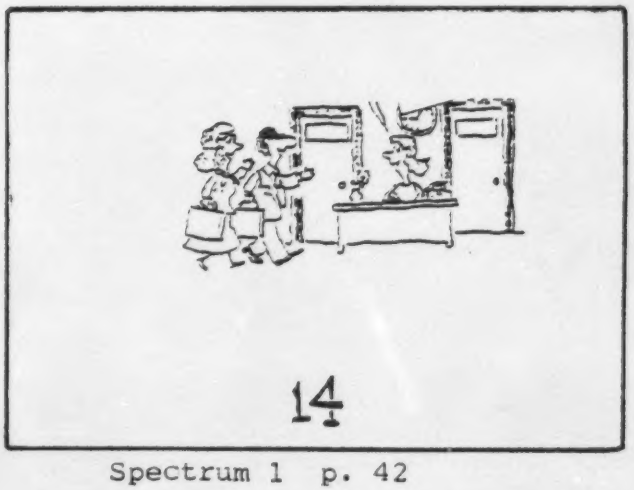
Active English Book 2 p. 23

SEMI-REAL



Looking at English Book 1 p. 22

STICK

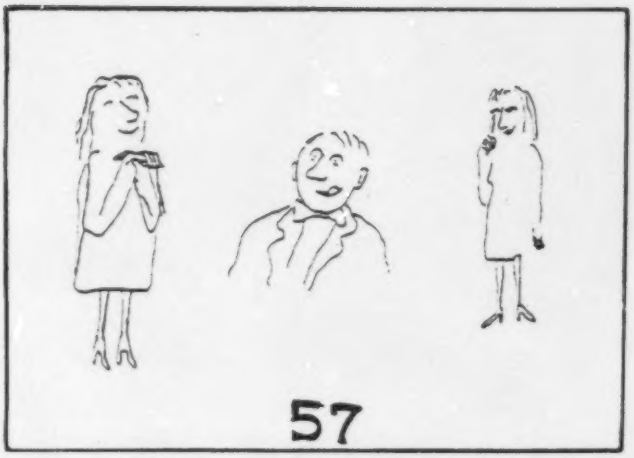


Spectrum 1 p. 42

CARTOON-CUTE

Practical English Book 1 p. 181

CARTOON-REAL



Handbook of Gestures: Colombia and the United States pp. 18-19

FREE-LINE

Method and Procedures

A booklet was prepared with each of the six representative illustrations on a separate page. Below each picture were six loosely paired statements with which subjects were to agree or disagree by checking or circling their opinion on a five-point Likert scale. The response possibilities were: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree. They were translated into numerical data later. One represented strongest agreement; five represented strongest disagreement. The statements being looked at for this study were: "I like this picture"/"I do not enjoy looking at this picture"(St. 3 and 5), and "This picture is good for an ESL textbook"/"This picture does not belong in an ESL textbook"(St. 4 and 1). The statistical tests were performed on the first (the affirmative) of the paired statements. Two distractor statements had to do with humor and seriousness. The final page of the booklet contained a ranking task, not analyzed for this study, of favorite to least favorite, and bio-data (age, sex, nationality, native language, student/teacher).

The booklet was distributed to intermediate and advanced level ESL classes during class time. An instruction page/cover letter asked subjects to look at the style of the drawings, not at the content. It was estimated that the task would take 10-20 minutes. Teachers and teacher trainees filled out the booklets either on their own or in class. Completed booklets were then sorted into regional groups: U.S., Asia, Western Europe, Middle East, and Latin America. The few that did not fall into one of these groups were eliminated from the data. It was felt that an n of 25-30 for each regional group was necessary for this study; however three of the regional groups, Western Europe, Middle East, and Latin America, provided samples that were too small. These data were reluctantly eliminated from the study. Another entire group from one source was eliminated when a check of the paired responses indicated that the majority had not understood the task--they had marked agree, for example, to all six paired responses.

Two regional groups remained for the study--U.S. and Asia. A 2x6 factorial design resulted, with two levels of regional group and six levels of illustrative style:

	Semi-real	Stick	Car-cute	Real	Free-line	Car-real
U.S.						
Asia						

Means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were computed. The data were then subject to the two-way analysis of variance and the Chi-square tests for statistical significance.

Subjects

The subjects were teachers, teachers trainees, and ESL students

from five California colleges and universities. The student population was literate, generally college- or profession-bound, and at least at an intermediate level of English proficiency. Student data ultimately used in the study represented a variety of countries in Asia--Japan, China, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Taiwan (n = 64). The U.S. group consisted of native English speaking American ESL teachers and teacher trainees (n = 40).

Table 1

$\bar{X}$, s: Statement 3 "I like this picture"

Scale: 1 = SA 2 = A 3 = U 4 = D 5 = SD

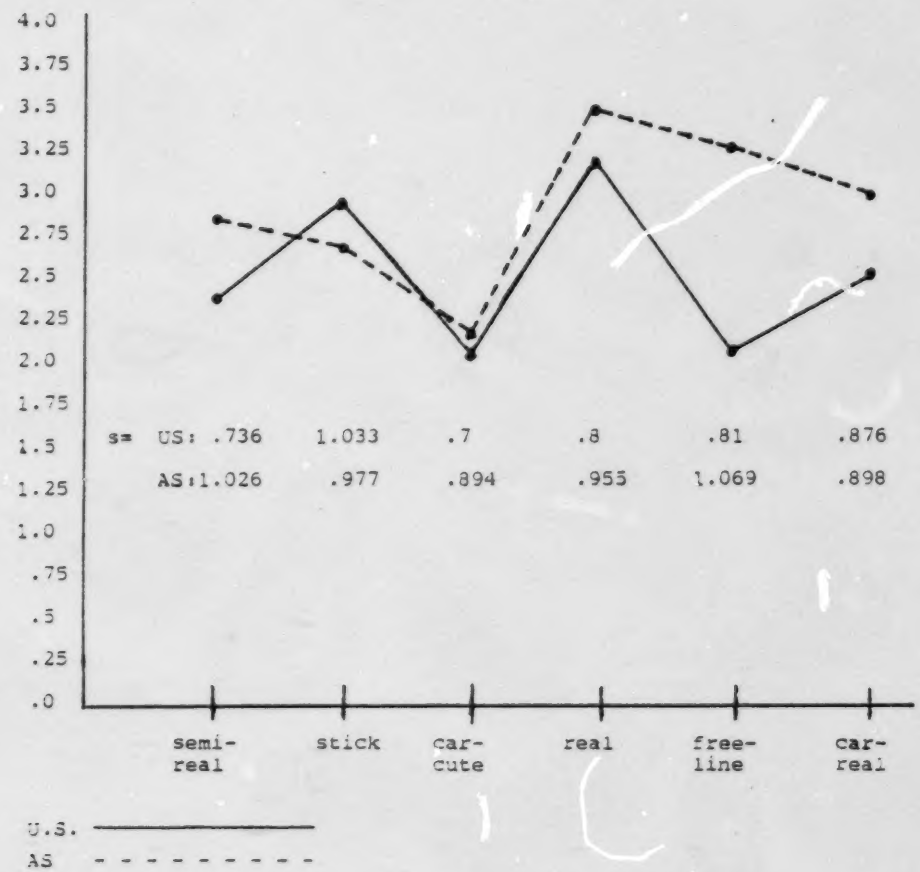
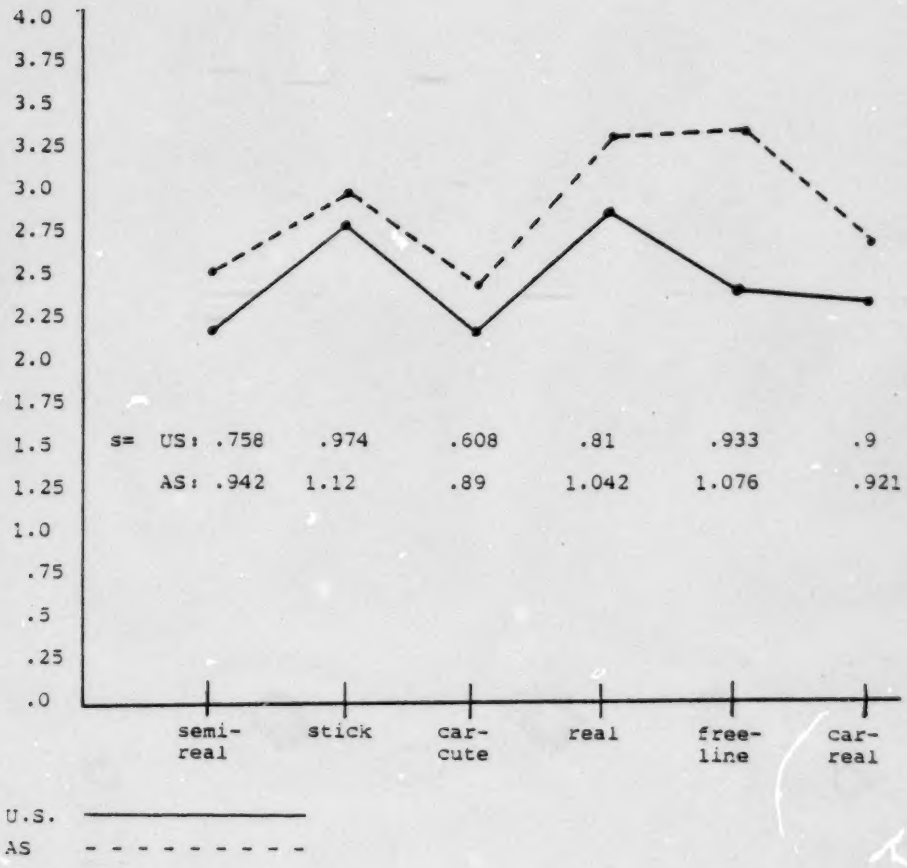


Table 2

$\bar{X}$, s: Statement 4 "This picture is good for an ESL textbook"

Scale: 1 = SA 2 = A 3 = U 4 = D 5 = SD



Results

Tables 1 and 2 display the means and standard deviations ($\bar{X}$, s) for responses to Statement 3 ("I like this picture") and Statement 4 ("This picture is good for an ESL textbook") on a five-point Likert scale in which choices ranged from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). Several observations might be made from this information. First, the smaller standard deviations

for the U.S. group on both statements seem to indicate more general agreement amoung the U.S. subjects. The Asian group exhibited greater differences of opinion. It is possible that these differences are a reflection of the diverse population within the very generally labeled group "Asia." Second, we can observe a general pattern of which illustrations were liked best and least--both groups had favorable responses to Cartoon-Cute and unfavorable responses to Real. Some differences between the two groups can be noted in their responses to Statements 3 and 4 for Semi-Real and Cartoon-Real. The largest disagreement, though, occurred in the responses of the two groups to Free-line, which the U.S. group found appealing and the Asian group disliked. The large standard deviations for the responses of the Asian group on both Statements 3 and 4 to Free-line indicate a great deal of divergence of opinion within the group itself, however.

Frequency distributions do, in fact, indicate a generally greater range of opinion among the Asian group. Further tests would have to be undertaken in order to determine whether these intra-group differences are personal or cultural. When the frequency distributions of the U.S. and Asian groups are compared using the Chi-square statistic, significant differences are found for three illustrations for Statement 3 ("I like this picture")--Semi-Real, Free-line, and Cartoon-Real, and for three from Statement 4 ("This picture is good for an ESL textbook")--Free-line, Cartoon-Real, and Real (Table 3). While relatively few subjects in either group marked extreme opinions of 1 or 5, many more Asians than U.S. subjects marked 2 or 4. Their opinions did not cluster at one point on the scale, but were spread somewhat evenly

over the three middle numbers--2, 3, and 4. Interestingly, all significant differences reflected a more negative response on the part of the Asian group and a more positive one on the part of the U.S. group.

Table 3
The Reactions of Teachers and Students to Illustrations in ESL Materials: Selected Tables

Frequencies and Chi-Square — St. 3 I like this picture. St. 4 This picture is good for an ESL textbook.

1. St.3 Semi-Real

$\chi^2 = 6.64$
$p = <.05$

scale	Abs Fr (N)	Rel Fr(%)	scale	Abs Fr (N)	Rel Fr (%)
1	3	7.5	1	2	3.2
2	23	57.5	2	29	45.3
3	11	27.5	3	15	23.4
4	3	7.5	4	15	23.4
5	0	0.0	5	3	4.7
	U.S.N=40			AS N=64	

2. St.3 Free-Line

$\chi^2 = 22.69$
$p = <.01$

scale	Abs Fr(N)	Rel Fr(%)	scale	Abs Fr(N)	Rel Fr(%)
1	8	20.0	1	1	1.6
2	23	57.5	2	20	31.3
3	6	15.0	3	12	18.8
4	3	7.5	4	24	37.5
5	0	0.0	5	7	10.9
	U.S. N=40			AS N=64	

3. St.3 Car-Real

$\chi^2 = 6.7$
$p = <.05$

scale	Abs Fr(N)	Rel Fr(%)	scale	Abs Fr(N)	Rel Fr(%)
1	1	2.5	1	2	3.1
2	24	60.0	2	20	31.3
3	8	20.0	3	22	34.4
4	6	15.0	4	19	29.7
5	1	2.5	5	1	1.6
	U.S. N=40			AS N=64	

4. St.4 Real

$\chi^2 = 10.94$
$p = <.01$

scale	Abs Fr(N)	Rel Fr(%)	scale	Abs Fr(N)	Rel Fr(%)
1	0	0.0	1	1	1.6
2	14	35.0	2	17	26.6
3	17	42.5	3	12	18.8
4	8	20.0	4	27	42.2
5	1	2.5	5	7	10.9
	U.S. N=40			AS N=64	

5. St. 4 Free-Line

$\chi^2 = 14.37$
$p = <.01$

scale	Abs Fr (N)	Rel Fr(%)	scale	Abs Fr(N)	Rel Fr(%)
1	3	7.5	1	0	0.0
2	23	57.5	2	19	29.7
3	7	17.5	3	12	18.8
4	6	15.0	4	23	35.9
5	1	2.5	5	10	15.6
	U.S. N=40			AS N=64	

6. St.4 Car-Real

$\chi^2 = 5.99$
$p = .05$

scale	Abs Fr(N)	Rel Fr (%)	scale	Abs Fr(N)	Rel Fr (%)
1	2	5.0	1	2	3.1
2	27	67.5	2	29	45.3
3	6	15.0	3	16	25.0
4	3	7.5	4	16	25.0
5	2	5.0	5	1	1.6
	U.S. N=40			AS N=64	

Significant differences in the responses of the Asian and the U.S. groups were also found for both Statements 3 and 4 when the data were analyzed by means of a two-way ANOVA. The results, displayed in Table 4 show differences at the $p<.01$ level of significance for all three sources--regional group, style, and group x style for Statement 3. For Statement 4, differences at the $p<.01$ level of significance occurred for both regional group and style. Post hoc comparisons, not completed at the present time, should reveal more precisely the source of these differences.

Table 4

2-way Analysis of Variance (U.S. N=40; AS N=64/Style = 6 levels)

1. St.3 I like this picture.

source	df	MSQ	F
reg. group	1	15.50	18.365*
style	5	13.290	15.747*
reg.gr. x style	5	5.785	6.855*
error	612	.834	

*p= <.01

2. St.4 This picture is good for an ESL textbook.

source	df	MSQ	F
reg. group	1	26.351	29.609 *
style	5	10.470	11.765 *
reg. gr. x style	5	1.486	1.669
error	612	.89	

*p = <.01

Discussion

In summary, the results of this study appear to be the following:

1) The subjects from the U.S. and Asia show common trends of like and dislike of certain illustrations--Stick (neutral),

Cartoon-cute (like), and Real (dislike).

2) The Asian group has strong negative reactions to the Free-line illustration, while the U.S. group reacted very positively.

3) There is much less general agreement among the Asian group than among the U.S. group.

4) The Asian group overall shows stronger negative responses to all illustrations for both Statements 3 and 4.

It is tempting to conclude from these results that cartoons of the "cute" humorous variety are popular across cultures, that realistic illustrations are generally unpopular, and that simple free-line drawings go over well with Americans but not at all well with Asians. Such conclusions should not, however, be drawn at this point, for reasons that will be discussed below. At this point, I think what we are able to say is that there are, in fact, cross-cultural differences in the perceptions of the appeal and appropriateness of ESL textbook illustrations. Pinpointing these differences and isolating cross-culturally popular and unpopular illustrative styles will require many more studies that eliminate some of the weaknesses of this pilot study.

First, it is not at all clear that the subjects are reacting to illustrative style and not to content of the illustrations used in this study. A separate study of the nonverbal communicative features of ESL textbook illustrations of the human figure needs to be done, and these nonverbal features (facial expression, posture, gesture) need to be controlled in subsequent studies of the effect of illustrative style. Sample illustrations that represent the same scene might be one approach. Second, other regional

(cultural, national) groups need to be included in subsequent studies in sufficient numbers so that statistical analyses can be carried out, and sub-groups (Japan, China, Korea) need to be looked at separately. Third, the research tool itself, the opinionnaire format, may need to be refined or revised so that the researcher can be more confident that the responses given truly reflect subjects' opinions of the appeal and appropriateness of the illustrative styles. Furthermore, empirical studies should be undertaken that attempt to look more rigorously at how teachers select textbooks and at the relative importance of illustrative style in the selection process. Finally, we should look carefully at the illustrations used in language teaching texts that are published in other countries for further clues as to what kinds of illustrations are considered appealing and appropriate.

If, as is surmised, illustrations do play an important role in the textbook selection process, and if our suspicion that cross-cultural differences in responses to illustrative style exist, then teachers, materials developers, illustrators, and publishers will eventually need to take a closer look at the visuals in materials being prepared for their target audiences. Since interaction with illustrations constitutes an integral part of so many language learning activities, illustrations need to suit the intended audience, not just the textbook selector. Until such time as we have answers to some of the intriguing questions raised by this study, let us simply be aware that, as we are selecting textbooks, our reactions to various illustrative styles are undoubtedly personal, may also be culture-specific, and are certainly not universal. Beauty may be in the eye of the cross-cultural beholder.

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